



48 HOURS IN

Scottsdale

HIGH DESERT · HIGH COUNTRY

WELCOME

Welcome to Scottsdale.

Scottsdale markets itself as “The West’s Most Western Town,” and then quietly builds some of the most serious restaurants and design culture in the American Southwest around that slogan. The result is a city that reads as resort-town polish on the surface — golf courses, spas, boutique hotels — but rewards anyone willing to walk a few blocks off the main drag with genuinely excellent food, significant architecture, and some of the best urban desert hiking in the country.

What most visitors miss: Scottsdale is Frank Lloyd Wright’s adopted home turf. Taliesin West, his winter home and desert laboratory, sits at the base of the McDowell Mountains and shaped the low-slung, horizon-hugging style you’ll see across the city. The McDowell Sonoran Preserve, one of the largest urban open-space preserves in the country, borders the city’s east side with more than 200 miles of trail — accessible before breakfast and back in time for lunch.

Scottsdale is well suited to solo travel for reasons that aren’t obvious from the outside. Old Town is compact and entirely walkable, restaurant counters and wine bars are built for single diners, and the city’s flat, sunny geography (roughly 314 days of sunshine a year) makes solo hiking and biking genuinely easy to plan around.

Day One · Pinnacle Peak · Taliesin West · Old Town

7:00 AM

Pinnacle Peak Trail

26802 N 102nd Way, North Scottsdale: a 3.5-mile out-and-back trail to a distinctive rock formation, with sweeping desert and mountain views the entire way. Well-maintained, well-marked, and popular enough to feel safe hiking solo. Free entry.

Insider Tip: Start before 8am, especially March through October — there’s minimal shade on the trail and the desert sun builds fast. The first half-mile has the steepest grade; it flattens out after that.

10:00 AM

Taliesin West

12621 N Frank Lloyd Wright Boulevard: Frank Lloyd Wright’s winter home and architecture school, built from 1937 onward using desert masonry that blends directly into the landscape. Guided tours run throughout the day; the 90-minute “Insights” tour is the best balance of depth and length. \$39–49.

Insider Tip: Book online in advance — tours sell out, especially in the winter high season. The site is still used as an architecture school, so the working-campus feel is genuine, not staged.

12:30 PM

Lunch: The Herb Box

7134 E Stetson Drive, Old Town: a bright, healthy-leaning lunch spot locals return to constantly. The Korean fried cauliflower and the chicken avocado chop salad are the two most-ordered dishes. \$16–24, counter and patio seating.

Insider Tip: The patio seating is pleasant even in the mid-day sun thanks to misting fans — ask for a shaded table if you’d rather sit outside.

2:00 PM

Old Town Scottsdale Walking

Bounded roughly by Scottsdale Road, Indian School, and Camelback: nine walkable districts of art galleries, boutiques, and historic sites, including the Little Red Schoolhouse and Cavalliere's Blacksmith Shop. The Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA) has a rotating collection and a permanent James Turrell skyspace installation. Admission \$10.

Insider Tip: Marshall Way and Main Street have the highest concentration of serious galleries — First Fridays art walks (monthly) are worth timing a trip around if the schedule allows.

5:30 PM

Happy Hour: AZ88

7353 Scottsdale Mall: an LGBTQ+-friendly cocktail bar in the heart of Old Town with a rotating display of local art and a well-crafted drink list. The martinis are famously filled to the very top of the glass — lean in before lifting.

Insider Tip: The patio overlooking the Scottsdale Mall civic space is the best seat for people-watching at golden hour.

7:30 PM

Dinner: FnB

7125 E 5th Avenue: Chef Charleen Badman's James Beard Award-winning restaurant, built around vegetable-forward cooking and an all-Arizona wine list. Reservations are genuinely hard to get — book as far ahead as the platform allows. \$55–80.

Insider Tip: If FnB is unavailable, Virtu Honest Craft a few blocks away runs a similarly serious, ingredient-driven kitchen with an easier bar-seat booking window.

Day Two · McDowell Sonoran Preserve · Museum of the West · Wine Trail

7:00 AM

McDowell Sonoran Preserve — Gateway Trailhead

18333 N Thompson Peak Parkway: more than 30,000 acres of protected Sonoran Desert on the city's eastern edge, with over 200 miles of marked trail. The Bell Pass Trail from the Gateway Trailhead is a moderate 5-mile loop with strong McDowell Mountain views. Free entry.

Insider Tip: The preserve's visitor center at the Gateway Trailhead has trail maps and water refill stations — worth a five-minute stop before setting out.

10:30 AM

Western Spirit: Scottsdale's Museum of the West

3830 N Marshall Way, Old Town: a genuinely excellent two-story museum on the history and mythology of the American West, with rotating exhibits ranging from cowboy artifacts to contemporary Western art. Admission \$17.

Insider Tip: Budget a full two hours — the collection is deeper than the building's size suggests, and the temporary exhibits rotate frequently enough to reward a return visit.

1:00 PM

Lunch: Secret Pizza — or Arcadia Farms Café

Arcadia Farms Café (7014 E 1st Avenue) is a longstanding Old Town institution favored for its garden patio and lighter lunch fare — quiche, salads, fresh bread. \$18–26.

Insider Tip: Solo lunch at the counter or a small patio table here is entirely normal — it's a regular local spot, not a tourist production.

3:00 PM

Scottsdale Fashion Square & Old Town Wine Trail

Old Town hosts a cluster of Arizona winery tasting rooms within walking distance of each other — Los Milics Vineyards and LDV Winery are two of the strongest, each pouring Arizona-grown, Rhone-style and Latin-varietal wines you won't find outside the state.

Insider Tip: Tasting flights run \$15–25 and take 30–45 minutes — an easy, sociable solo activity that doesn't require planning ahead.

6:00 PM

Canal Club & Old Town Waterfront

4501 N Scottsdale Road: a 1950s-era Cuban-style bar along the Arizona Canal, with the Scottsdale Waterfront's public art and canal-side path just outside. A relaxed pre-dinner stop with genuine mid-century atmosphere.

Insider Tip: Walk the canal path at sunset — the public art installations and mountain-backed skyline make it one of the better free views in the city.

7:30 PM

Dinner: Café Monarch

6939 E 1st Avenue: a small, seasonal four-course prix fixe restaurant consistently ranked among the best in the country. Reservations essential, booked weeks ahead in peak season. \$95–130 with wine pairing.

Insider Tip: If a reservation isn't available, Reserve — an intimate garden restaurant a few doors down from the same ownership group — is a strong and easier-to-book alternative.

WHERE TO EAT

Scottsdale's Table

FINE DINING

FnB

OLD TOWN · \$\$\$\$

James Beard Award-winning vegetable-forward cooking and an all-Arizona wine list. Book far ahead.

Café Monarch

OLD TOWN · \$\$\$\$

Seasonal four-course prix fixe, consistently ranked among the best restaurants in the country.

Virtu Honest Craft

OLD TOWN · \$\$\$

Serious, ingredient-driven Italian-leaning cooking with an easier bar-seat booking window than FnB.

CASUAL & LOCAL

The Herb Box

OLD TOWN · \$\$

Bright, healthy-leaning lunch counter loved by locals — the Korean fried cauliflower is the order.

Arcadia Farms Café

OLD TOWN · \$\$

Garden-patio institution serving quiche, salads, and fresh bread — easy solo lunch.

Sugar Bowl

OLD TOWN · \$

An Old Town dessert rite of passage since 1958 — pink interior, ice cream sundaes, genuine nostalgia.

BARS & WINE

AZ88

OLD TOWN · \$\$

LGBTQ+-friendly cocktail bar with rotating local art and a lively patio at golden hour.

Canal Club

OLD TOWN · \$\$

1950s Cuban-style bar along the Arizona Canal — relaxed, mid-century atmosphere.

LDV Winery

OLD TOWN · \$\$

Family-owned tasting room pouring single-varietal, Rhone-style Arizona wines.

GETTING AROUND

Navigating Scottsdale

MODE	COST	NOTES
Walking	Free	Old Town's nine districts are entirely walkable in sequence.
Uber / Lyft	Varies	Best for Taliesin West, McDowell Sonoran Preserve, and evening transport.
Rental Car	\$45–70/day	Useful for Taliesin West and preserve trailheads if not using rideshare.
Scottsdale Trolley	Free	Seasonal free trolley loops connecting Old Town to nearby shopping districts.
Bike Rentals	\$8–15/hr	Scottsdale has 100+ miles of paved paths — flat and easy for casual riding.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

TOPIC	DETAILS
Getting There	Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport (PHX) is 15–20 minutes from Old Town — Uber (\$20–30).
Best Time	November–April: ideal desert weather (60–80°F), peak season with resort pricing. May and October are shoulder months. June–August: extreme heat, regularly 105°F+.
Solo Dining	Old Town's counter and bar-seat culture makes solo dining easy — FnB, The Herb Box, and AZ88 all handle single diners comfortably.
Hydration	Carry 2+ liters of water for any hike; the McDowell Sonoran Preserve and Pinnacle Peak Trail have minimal shade.
Booking Ahead	Reserve Taliesin West tours and dinners at Café Monarch or FnB well in advance, especially in the November–April high season.
Useful Apps	Uber, OpenTable (restaurant reservations), AllTrails for preserve trail conditions, Google Maps offline.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE: FINAL CHECKLIST

- Book Taliesin West tour online in advance — popular tours sell out
- Reserve FnB or Café Monarch weeks ahead if visiting in peak season (Nov–Apr)
- Start any hike (Pinnacle Peak, McDowell Sonoran Preserve) before 8am, March–October
- Pack sun protection — wide-brimmed hat and SPF are non-negotiable even in winter
- Check the First Fridays Art Walk schedule if visiting on a Friday
- Download AllTrails for offline preserve trail maps
- Carry cash for smaller Old Town wine-tasting rooms

GoingSolo.Life

Your interactive map is one scan away.

All locations from this guide, colour-coded by day, open on your phone.

goingsolo.life/maps/scottsdale

TRAVEL ALONE. LIVE FULLY.

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